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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2920  
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 5901  
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 5109  
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ PRIORITY 1580  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 9782  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 1652  
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS PRIORITY 0351  
RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON PRIORITY 1276  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0396  
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 3007  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0300  
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY 0532  
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE PRIORITY 0769  
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO PRIORITY 3525  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0525  
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES PRIORITY 0971  
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO PRIORITY 3222  
RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA PRIORITY 0914  
RUEHAO/AMCONSUL CURACAO PRIORITY 0543  
RUEHMI/USOFFICE FRC FT LAUDERDALE PRIORITY 2777  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 06 CARACAS 000219

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CARACAS

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT R. DOWNES FOR 1.4 (D)

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (S//NF) As noted in REF A, the Venezuelan relationship with Cuba continues to intensify. Thousands of personnel sent by the Cuban Government are involved in the Venezuelan health sector and other BRV social missions. Cubans cooperate extensively with Venezuelan intelligence services. Cubans may also participate heavily in the BRV's efforts to naturalize foreigners and provide documentation for citizens, according to various reports from Embassy contacts. Cubans' roles in the military are less clear but probably are also less significant.

[1](#)2. (C) Venezuelans' views of individual Cubans are mixed. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez appears to be trying to promote the involvement of Cubans in Venezuelan society, although he has proceeded slowly and carefully. Anti-Chavez politicians have barked up the wrong tree by decrying Cuban communism and sovereignty violations, issues that simply do not resonate with poor Venezuelans. While the economic impact of Cubans working in Venezuela may be limited, Cuban intelligence has much to offer to Venezuela's anti-U.S.

intelligence services. End Summary.

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How Many Cubans?  
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¶3. (S) Although the numbers of Cubans sent by the GOC to work in Venezuela are significant, the exact figures are difficult to establish. Embassy officers have noted regular flights of Cubans--or Venezuelans returning from official visits to Cuba--at Caracas's Maiquetia airport. According to a DOD analysis of flight activity, an average of about 350 people arrive on three to five commercial or military flights from Cuba to Venezuela per day. Most of these flights land at Maiquetia, but Barcelona and Maracaibo are also common destinations. Post cannot determine how many Cubans are on the flights or how many passengers stay in Venezuela permanently. Airport officials spirit passengers through the building without stopping in customs or immigration. ONIDEX, Venezuela's National Office of Identification and Immigration, reports that it naturalized only 12 Cubans out of a group of 22,664 persons naturalized in December 2005. Whether or not they enjoy Venezuelan citizenship, however, thousands of Cubans have Venezuelan documentation. In addition to the over 20,000 Cubans involved in the Venezuelan health sector (see below), less reliable reports indicate that thousands more are active in the Venezuelan interior. Manuel Rosales, the opposition Governor of Zulia State, told the DCM in October 2005 that 20,000 Cubans resided in Zulia alone. Former National Assembly deputy Pedro Pablo Alcantara (Accion Democratica) told us in October that Lara State had the most Cubans per capita in Venezuela. He claimed more flights from Havana arrived in Barquisimeto, Lara than in

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Caracas. Complicating the matter further are some 30,000 Cuban exiles in Venezuela, the Cuban exile NGO Net for Cuba estimates.

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Health  
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¶4. (C) The BRV created Mision Barrio Adentro (Inside the Neighborhood Mission) to provide basic health care for disadvantaged neighborhoods in December 2003, shortly after signing a bilateral agreement with Cuba to swap oil for medical services. As of mid-2005, about 21,000 Cuban physicians, nurses, and support staff along with some 6,000 Venezuelan personnel staffed the mission, according to the Ministry of Communication. Mission clinics are small, two-story hexagonal structures that also house two to three doctors. The BRV provides the clinics' equipment and reduced-cost medicines. Through Barrio Adentro, the BRV identifies patients eligible for Mision Milagro (Miracle Mission), which flies Venezuelans to Havana for cataract surgery. Anecdotal reporting suggests the care Cuban doctors provide is often lacking and that many "physicians" are actually medical students. The BRV has recently begun Mision Barrio Adentro II, a network of more advanced diagnostic centers and inpatient clinics to be administered and staffed mostly by Venezuelans.

¶5. (C) Notwithstanding the 90,000 to 100,000 barrels of oil Venezuela provides Cuba per day on barter terms, Cuban doctors earn relatively little. According to press reports, Cuban doctors receive salaries of up to USD 400 per month, a figure slightly lower than local averages. A Cuban physician told Post's medical advisor, however, that he received room, board, and toiletries but that the Cuban Government was "holding" his salary until he finished his two-year tour. Some Cuban doctors have "deserted" and fled. A European diplomat told polcouns in mid-January 2006 that the number of Cuban asylum requests received by EU missions in Venezuela had increased over the past few months. A local legislator with extensive contacts in poor neighborhoods told us in

November 2005 that Cuban doctors complained bitterly that the Cuban regime held their families hostage while the doctors relied on local donations to survive. In contrast, according to REF B, the GOC receives from Venezuela between USD 1,000 to 5,000 for each Mision Milagro cataract operation, which is comparable to the roughly USD 3,500 that a Venezuelan private clinic would charge for the procedure.

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Intelligence  
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¶6. (S//NF) Sensitive reports indicate Cuban and Venezuelan intelligence ties are so advanced that the two countries' agencies appear to be competing with each other for the BRV's attention. Cuban intelligence officers have direct access to Chavez and frequently provide him with intelligence reporting unvetted by Venezuelan officers. Venezuela's Directorate of Intelligence and Prevention Services (DISIP), moreover, may be taking advice from Cuban intelligence on the formation of a new intelligence service (REF C). Cuban intelligence officers train Venezuelans both in Cuba and in Venezuela, providing both political indoctrination and operational

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instruction. They also may work in other Venezuelan government ministries, unconfirmed sensitive reporting suggests.

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Military  
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¶7. (C) Post has received no credible reports of extensive Cuban involvement in the Venezuelan military, despite the Venezuelan Armed Forces' attempts to imitate Cuban military doctrine and uniforms. According to DAO reports, Cubans train and advise Chavez' military security detail. Anti-Chavez military officers have told us that Cubans hold liaison and personnel exchange positions within the Venezuelan military formerly held by European and other Latin American officers. Moreover, a few Venezuelan military officers--along with some from the Foreign Ministry--undergo ideological training in Cuba. Chavez has also sent a military team to Cuba construct a complex of 150 houses, according to press reports.

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Other Sectors?  
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¶8. (S//NF) Cuban involvement in other agencies and missions is harder to confirm. Cubans have been heavily involved in ONIDEX, according to various unconfirmed sources. A local academic with a background in electoral systems told poloff that Venezuelans trained in Cuba helped expand the national electoral registry by over two million voters through Mision Identidad (Identity Mission) in 2003. He added that the Venezuelan process to receive an identity card was a carbon copy of the Cuban process. Anti-Chavez military officers told us in July 2005 that Cubans helped run ONIDEX and reported that an active duty army colonel was running an operation to print identity cards for Cubans. According to an Embassy employee with access to secure areas of Caracas' Maiquetia airport, Cubans hold supervisory positions at the airport's auxiliary terminal. Cubans also have established and continue to service the airport's biometrics equipment, according to sensitive reports. Some anecdotal sensitive reporting further suggests Cuban officials had a Venezuelan officer dismissed for resisting their attempts to take temporary operational control over a section of the airport during a visit of Cuban leader Fidel Castro.

¶9. (C) Ruben Flores, the editor of a rancher newspaper, told poloff in early 2005 that Cuban involvement in the agricultural sector was second only to that in the health

sector. Such a claim may be exaggerated, but Cubans are likely involved to a great extent. According to the Agricultural Attache, Cuban officials hold senior positions in the Ministry of Agriculture and also operate in the Venezuelan interior. Citing technical experts in the Ministry, Flores told us in January 2006 that Cuban officials were helping design Venezuela's "Planting Plan 2006," which would prescribe the crops to be sown in each region. Jaime Perez Branger, head of the company that owns cattle ranch and nature preserve Hato Pinero, told us in January that Cubans advised the BRV on agricultural productivity and on setting up cooperatives in such missions as Vuelvan Caras. (Vuelvan Caras, or "About Face," is a BRV program offering six months

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of job training, after which participants form cooperatives, often in the agricultural sector.) Venezuela, South America's only net importer of agricultural products, is also setting up Cuban sugar mills in Venezuela in the wake of Cuba's failing sugar industry.

¶10. (C) Industry contacts have told the Agricultural Attache that Cubans helped design and manage Mision Mercal, the BRV's subsidized grocery program. An Arthur D. Little consultant told us in February 2005 that a Cuban vice minister of commerce works with Mercal full-time. Flores told poloff in January 2006 that ALIMPORT, Cuba's agency that handles all food imports, was advising the BRV on food distribution. Venezuela finances some of its own food imports through a Havana branch of the Industrial Bank of Venezuela, and Chavez' brother Adan Chavez, the Venezuelan Ambassador there, may profit illicitly from the loan process, according to DAO reporting (REF D).

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Venezuelan Views of Cubans  
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¶11. (SBU) Cuban citizens' resentment of Venezuelans (REF A) is not completely mutual. Some Venezuelans, including many who experienced the infiltration of violent Cuban revolutionaries during the 1960s, do dislike Cubans. The average Venezuelan's view of Cubans, however, is more nuanced. Some poor Venezuelans admire Cubans involved in the missions for providing free services. Others, while disapproving of their political system, appreciate Cuban culture displayed by individual Cubans, especially those among the exile community.

¶12. (SBU) Chavez appears to be trying to promote a friendly image of Cubans. Cubans have appeared increasingly on public television, including on Chavez' "Alo Presidente" show. Images of crossed Cuban and Venezuelan flags have also begun to appear in Caracas. The polling firm Datanalisis reports that Chavez' recent attempts to "sell" the Cuban political model may have increased Venezuelans' rejection of the Cuban regime from May 2005 (63 percent) to October 2005 (81 percent). (Embassy note: Whether Chavez' promotion of Cuba is paying off or backfiring is unclear. Answers to Datanalisis' question, "what do you think of Venezuela taking the Cuban regime as a model," may reflect a growing sense of nationalism and uniqueness among Venezuelans--consistent with Chavez' calls for a "new socialism"--rather than a rejection of Cubans. Indeed, almost half of the Chavez supporters polled, who would seem least likely to oppose Cuba, responded negatively.)

¶13. (SBU) Despite the increasing publicity, signs of Cuban-Venezuelan partnership in Caracas are not as ubiquitous as they apparently are in Havana, and Cubans generally keep a low profile. Chavez' sense of self-importance may partly explain why Cuba figures less prominently. The "Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America" is not a synonym for Cuban-Venezuelan cooperation in Venezuela because Chavez pitches it as a movement he has launched throughout the hemisphere. Chavez features call-ins from Castro during his

public appearances, such as a mid-January 2006 sendoff for Venezuelans going to study medicine in Cuba. Nonetheless, Chavez does not part with the spotlight for long. His weekly

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"Alo Presidente" broadcasts routinely run longer than five hours.

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The Opposition Has Failed...  
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¶14. (C) Some of Chavez' opponents appear to be trying to inflame a prejudice against Cubans that is uncommon among Venezuelans. They rant about "Cuban invaders" and "sovereignty violations" that resonate little with the Venezuelan poor. Opposition politicians also berate Chavez for attempting to introduce Cuban communism, although few Venezuelans believe he will do so. Former opposition National Assembly deputy Carlos Casanova (Socialdemocrata) told poloff the public's response to the opposition was "look around, this isn't communism, chico!" Still, over-the-top critiques can impede focused criticism. Asked how the opposition could exploit opposition to Chavez' oil "loans" to Cuba, Accion Democratica's former international relations secretary Alfredo Coronil replied to poloff that Cuba was

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planning to intervene in Africa after Venezuela, brushing aside poloff's remark that Cuba could hardly still afford adventurism on a Cold War scale.

¶15. (C) The political opposition does little to exploit alleged medical malpractice in Mision Barrio Adentro or to report on returning Mision Milagro patients' impressions of Cuba. In fact, much of the opposition remains ignorant of how such missions work because it does not reach out to poor neighborhoods for the most part. One anti-Chavez retired military officer, however, told poloff in June 2005 that groups of Venezuelan doctors had begun treating people in poor areas with the support of certain pharmacies. The scope of the initiative is unclear.

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...But Finally Getting the Picture?  
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¶16. (U) Primero Justicia (PJ) has been the only political party to criticize Chavez consistently for his handouts to other countries. Promising additional programs to redistribute oil wealth, PJ presidential candidate Julio Borges has asked the BRV to explain why ordinary Venezuelans are not receiving the money sent to Cuba, according to press reports. With the closure of the Caracas-La Guaira bridge, other elements of the opposition are also beginning to contrast BRV gifts abroad with problems at home. An internet blog site has displayed the amounts spent on foreign infrastructure next to photos of the crumbling bridge. During its assembly in mid-January 2006, the Venezuelan Episcopal Conference criticized grants and loans the BRV had awarded overseas.

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Comment  
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¶17. (C) The economic impact of Cubans in Venezuela is mixed but limited. (Venezuelan subsidies to Cuba, on the other hand, could eventually pose greater problems for the BRV (SEPTTEL).) By helping the BRV pad its voter rolls and naturalize suspicious immigrants, Cubans are doing jobs that

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Venezuelan government personnel could and would do in their

absence. Cuban doctors, however, are treating communities mostly unreached by Venezuelan health services. Venezuela continues to purchase costly conventional weapons systems despite the influence on paper of Cuba's "asymmetric" warfare doctrine.

¶18. (S//NF) The impact of Cuban involvement in Venezuelan intelligence could impact U.S. interests directly. Venezuelan intelligence services are among the most hostile towards the United States in the hemisphere, but they lack the expertise that Cuban services can provide. Cuban intelligence routinely provides the BRV intelligence reports about the activities of the USG. Cuban dissemination of ideological propaganda in Venezuela is less of a threat. Chavez, the revolution's most effective proponent, still appears to be involving Cubans in public discourse and BRV projects with some discretion.